



## REPRESENTING MASCULINITY

*Images of men in post-1960s British advertising*

Niss, Hanne

*Publication date:*  
1997

*Document Version*  
Early version, also known as pre-print

[Link to publication from Aalborg University](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Niss, H. (1997). *REPRESENTING MASCULINITY: Images of men in post-1960s British advertising*. Department of History, International and Social Studies, Aalborg University.

### General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal -

### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at [vbn@aub.aau.dk](mailto:vbn@aub.aau.dk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

**European Studies**  
**Europäische Studien**  
**Etudes européennes**  
**Estudios europeos**  
**Europastudier**

25

**SERIES OF OCCASIONAL PAPERS**

**REPRESENTING MASCULINITY**  
**Images of men in post-1960s British advertising**

Hanne Niss

**European Studies** is a series featuring publications on European issues (cultural, communicative, economic, political), in a historical, contemporary and cross-cultural perspective. Further the series will comprise publications focussing on matters of interest to the history, structure and current development of the European community.

**European Studies** is published by the European Research Unit in collaboration with the Department of Development and Planning and the Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies at Aalborg University, Denmark.

Requests and orders for issues can be made to the following address:

*European Research Unit  
Aalborg University  
Fibigerstraede 2  
DK-9220 Aalborg O  
Denmark*

*Phone: +45 96 35 80 80, ext. 9133  
Fax: +45 98 15 11 26*

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	5
Representation and Gender .....	5
Literature Review .....	6
<b>Gender Codes in Advertising</b> .....	8
Toward a Redefinition of Gender Codes? .....	13
<b>Advertising's Three Decades of Male Iconography</b> .....	14
Methodology .....	14
Bond Man .....	15
Old Spice Man .....	16
Brut Man .....	17
Active Passive Man .....	17
Tetley Bitterman .....	18
Levi's Man .....	18
Yuppie Man .....	19
New Man .....	19
Ironic Man .....	20
Torso Man .....	20
Chippendale Man .....	21
<b>The Male Body as Sexual Display</b> .....	22
Gender Roles as Display .....	22
<b>Conclusion and Directions for Future Research</b> .....	23
<b>Notes</b> .....	25
<b>References</b> .....	26

## Introduction

There is a long tradition of feminist research on the portrayal of women in advertising. In contrast, relatively little research has been done on the imaging of men. Apparently, media studies have not considered masculinity problematic, or at least not sufficiently so as to warrant detailed investigation.

The gap in existing research concerns the analysis of the ways in which advertising constructs masculinity as a cultural category. Although the women's movement has helped develop an increased awareness of the role that advertising plays in maintaining an entrenched gender hierarchy, our understanding will remain incomplete as long as the question is pursued solely from the side of and in terms of representations of women. To round out the picture it is also important to consider how advertising addresses and depicts men.

The study of masculinity within a media context inevitably leads us back to issues of femininity and sexuality, and the links between gender, representation, and identity, to the construction of individual subjectivities. These are complex issues, hence some important terms need to be defined first, so that the thrust of the paper is clear.

### *Representation and Gender*

How individuals see themselves, and how they are viewed by others, is shored up by representation. Representation determines how a group is presented in cultural forms, and whether an individual is identified as a member of that group. Representations are presentations. Representation always, and necessarily, entails the use of codes and conventions of presentation within a specific discourse, limiting the possibilities of depiction. Discursive regimes restrict and shape what can be said, or read, about any aspect of life as lived. Discourses, in Foucault's terms, bring cultural objects into being by naming them, defining them, and delimiting their field of operation

(Foucault, 1981). These objects of knowledge then become linked to specific practices. Practices realise and set the conditions for discourse, while discourse, reciprocally, feeds back utterances which facilitate practices.

Dominant discourses surrounding gender encourage us to accept that the human race is 'naturally' divided into male and female, each gender realistically identifiable by a set of immutable characteristics. Advertisements and other cultural products do not simply reflect a 'natural' gender difference, they also help constitute that difference.

One of the principal arguments developed in this paper is that in order to understand the relationship between representation and sexuality, we need to explore further the ways in which meanings are circulated between medium, audience, and socio-economic context. The paper therefore links up the analysis of the masculine in advertising with a closer scrutiny of the socio-economic and commercial realities in which different images of masculinity have been propagated over the years. Purposes are to examine how the meanings of the masculine are constructed within the discourse of advertising, and to establish the role that advertising plays in shaping and transmitting gender ideology.

The paper is divided into two parts. The first part analyses the use of gender codes in advertising from a sociological and socio-economic perspective. The second part is empirically based. On the basis of selected print ads and TV commercials, the analysis traces the evolution of 'Homo Narcissus' in UK advertising, analysing the way that men and men's bodies have been portrayed in British ads and TV commercials over the past three decades. The aim is to analyse the changes that have taken place over the years in the promotional depiction of masculinity, and to discuss the possible effects of these changed male representations.

### *Literature Review*

Since the 1970s, feminist analysis has sought to uncover the unconstructed messages behind the images of women presented in the media, seeing the way that women are depicted as crucial in shaping the way that women (and men) live. The women's movement was instrumental in opening up the image of the feminine for analysis, in creating the environment in which 'the natural' could be deconstructed. 'Without the women's movement, a desire to question representation in this way could not be

articulated, nor would the public or even the private space to do so exist' (Kuhn, 1985:3).

Understandably, feminism focused primarily on uncovering the messages about women's identity and women's role in society. The depiction of men and masculinity was of interest only in as far as it related to the portrayal of women and the feminine. As Germaine Greer puts it, the underlying philosophy was that 'man is a human being, but woman is a cultural artefact' (Greer, 1979:16). Research since, concentrating on deconstructing that artefact, has served to reinforce the notion that masculinity is still largely unconstructed; it 'remains the untouched and untouchable ground against which femininity figures as the repressed and/or unspoken' (Holmlund, 1993:214).

One of the few researchers who has attempted to uncover the masculinity subtext in advertising research is Fejes (1992). He found that research dealing with advertising revealed 'a high degree of stereotyped presentation of gender roles' (Fejes, 1992:13), although by the end of the 1980s the studies suggested some changes. In particular, there had been a significant decline in the portrayal of men in traditional roles, such as husband, father, athlete and construction worker (1992:14).

Research has also been carried out by Wernick (1991). In a survey of the portrayal of men in advertisements from the 1950s to the 1980s, Wernick found that, although a patriarchal value system endured, in certain limited respects advertisers were beginning to treat male and female as 'formally interchangeable terms'. Thus, according to Wernick, change had occurred in the following three areas: 'men's depicted relation to their social milieu, to the world of things, and to sexuality' (1991:51). In the 1950s, men were invariably portrayed as husbands and fathers, and masculinity, in the themes and images of advertising, was projected symbolically onto the material world through gender-coded goods and contexts. In the 1980s, advertisers began to move away from depicting men in family roles and toward increasingly depicting them alone (ibid). As we shall see later, this trend is still very much in vogue in 1997. In fact many ads seem to make a point out of *not* revealing the family status of the individuals they depict. Often people are shown alone, in close-ups, that by removing context permits ambiguity, letting consumers from a range of social contexts place themselves in the position of the subject. When men are shown with others, it is usually in the context of first encounters, usually with women, where the degree of



commitment, if any, is left vague, or in male peer groups that are even further removed from the family frame. The elevation of the peer group has been particularly evident in ads which position their products as symbols of a wider social or cultural belonging, such as ads for Coke and Pepsi in which uni-generational fellowship and solidarity across national-cultural borders have been the main themes.

Along with the displacement of men in advertisements from fixed family roles and the decreasing use of masculinity as an ideologically fixed term, Wernick identifies a parallel loosening of the links between masculinity and a particular type of aggressive sexuality, traditionally associated with 'being a man'. Increasingly, advertisers have begun to depict male and female not as binary opposites, but as fluid categories that occupy equivalent places in society. The resultant image is one which incorporates various constructions of masculinity, ranging from a passively narcissistic version of sexuality, traditionally associated with femininity, to a more active, outwardly-directed, and aggressive type of sexuality, traditionally associated with masculinity. Eventually, the co-existence of both constructions of masculinity (and, by implication, femininity) creates a type of heterogeneity.

The question is whether the softening of the image of masculinity witnessed in many contemporary ads reflects a questioning of real gender inequalities, or whether it should be read as a signifier of a more abstract form of equality, premised, mainly, on the levelling effects of the market? This question will be addressed in the next section. What seems clear, though, is that in order to tap into the desires of all potential consumers, advertisers are attempting to address the full spectrum of gender interests and orientations that constitute society. The end result is advertisements in which men and women are beginning to look and behave in a similar manner, suggesting a sort of homogenization of male and female values.

## **Gender Codes in Advertising**

As Wernick (1991:48) points out, gender codes build on a duality. To get a fuller picture of how ads have come to encode masculinity (and, correspondingly, femininity) in the 1990s, it is important to consider how advertising has revised its gender codings in general over the past 30 years. How have appeals to male vanity



come to be such an acceptable way of addressing and portraying men? In the past it was regarded as a sure sign of deviance and unmanliness - qualities few clients would have wanted associated with their products. Today many ads portray men in poses that only a few years ago would have been considered effeminate, even homoerotic.

The explanation for this is more complex than it seems. For a start, there are sound commercial reasons for the ever more explicit appeals to male vanity and narcissism. Once cosmetic manufacturers realised that the male market was still largely virgin territory, they had to find a way of persuading men that it is actually macho to use a moisturiser and not fey to have a facial, hence the pictures of muscular, young men splashing on the perfume. Of course, these ads are no doubt also intended to appeal to women, still the major buyers of men's toiletries. Nevertheless, the growing involvement of men in everyday consumption has changed the relation between men and advertising, giving men as private people a consumer status, thus making them an ever more important part of the 'you' that advertisers address.

One of the problems that advertisers face is how to formulate such an address in a way that appeals to men, and at the same time avoiding raising homophobic associations. Many products, therefore, have to go through a 'tough-guy transformation' in order to win over its audience. This doesn't just apply to personal-care products and accessories, the ultimate symbols of male vanity, but also to more mundane products such as foodstuffs and beverages. In 1994, for instance, Pepsico introduced a new television commercial for Diet Pepsi, except that it was Diet Pepsi for men - hence Pepsi Max. The commercial featured four long-haired grungey types parachuting over mountains and canoeing over waterfalls. All very manly, even if you're counting the calories.

The need to downplay the presumed feminine connotations associated with low-calorie products also seems to be the main force behind the advertising of Quorn, a low-calorie fast food product marketed in England. Here the advertisers hired the captain of the English rugby team, Will Carling, to endorse the product in order to make it seem more macho.

What the above examples show is that advertisers are extremely conscious about employing the 'right' gender codes in the 'right' contexts, i.e. gender codes that can help validate the cultural categories of masculinity and femininity, and which are thus more likely to appeal to specific male or female audiences. Hence, according to a

spokesman for Pepsico<sup>1</sup>, the corporation wanted to avoid the usual, passive (and presumably female) image of diet products when it first launched Pepsi Max. It had therefore to appear vibrant and vital - presumably male. As described by Goodwin (1995), this thesis applies to the whole exercise and diet industry. Cindy Crawford and Jane Fonda may jump around cheerfully explaining their exercise and diet routines to their female audience, but men have to learn their exercise routines from much tougher instructors. One British example is *The Royal Marines Total Fitness Book* - one of only a few such products aimed at men alone. It has approximately the same exercises that Jane Fonda & Co carry out, but here demonstrated by two soldiers covered in mud and sweat, and generally looking very, very tough.

Qualitative analyses of beer commercials have revealed a similarly stereotypical view of masculinity. Thus Strate's analysis of beer commercials (Strate, 1992) suggests that the brewing industry relies heavily on stereotypes of macho-masculinity to sell beer to men. According to Strate, beer advertisements provide such a single, consistent image of masculinity that they could be seen to constitute 'a guide for becoming a man, a rule book for appropriate male behaviour, in short, a manual on masculinity' (1992:78). In the advertisements analysed by Strate, drinking beer is associated with a variety of occupational and leisure activities, all of which involve meeting and overcoming a challenge of some type. According to the commercials, 'work is an integral part of a man's identity', and men 'fill their leisure time....in active pursuits usually conducted in outdoor settings...and in "hanging out", usually in bars', an unrelenting, one-dimensional representation of masculinity that 'is clearly anachronistic, possibly laughable, but without a doubt sobering' (Strate, 1992:80, 81,92).

Of course, the above examples only tell half the story. Advertisers have to negotiate between many different models of masculinity, including those represented by gender-bending pop stars such as Prince and the coming out of gays. The kind of active, outwardly directed male image conveyed by the Pepsi Max commercial and the beer commercials cited by Strate is by no means the only construction of masculinity apparent in contemporary advertising. With the rise of feminism and the more general sex/gender upheaval associated with it, many of the old assumptions about sexuality, masculinity, and what distinguishes men from women have been shaken, giving way for a redefinition of traditional male/female domains and sex/gender identities. This is

also reflected in the way advertising constructs masculinity and femininity, respectively. The old codes of gender difference are still at play, but they now operate alongside a code of sameness and equality. According to the old code, men hunt, women attract. Men are active, instrumental, inner-directed and associated with power, while women are passive, expressive, caring and dependent on others. According to the new code, male and female are mobile categories, occupying equivalent if not identical places in the world. At one level, this code of equivalence in the promotional representation of men and women may be said to echo an actual trend in society at large, yet as Wernick argues:

The de-linking of masculinity from fixed familial, cosmological, and sexual positions has effectively transformed it, along with other sex/gender terms, into a floating signifier, free within any given promotional context to swirl around and substitute for its paired opposite at will. (...) Like colour, setting and decor, sex and gender have become arbitrary predicates of the commodities with which they are associated, the choice of any particular set being determined by the marketing context in which they are tactically deployed. In this way, male and female, masculine and feminine, men and women, have joined with other symbolized aspects of life and society to become the mere stuff of cultural coinage, circulating without any organic reference to what such tokens purport to represent and express (1991:63-64).

By treating male and female as formally interchangeable terms, the iconic conventions of promotion are becoming sufficiently flexible to allow men and women to be positioned at either end of the objectified/objectifying sexual continuum. Indeed in ads for brands aimed at both sexes, male/female interchangeability may be emphasized as a feature in itself. In the androgynous imagery which often results, even the sexual orientation of the figures depicted is left open for interpretation. One example is the demure orgies shown in Calvin Klein's *Obsession* campaign where the sexual meaning of the scenes is completely open. The reading it permits is genderically indeterminate: it may be male or female, gay or straight, or, as Wernick himself suggests: bisexual - an interpretation which, in Wernick's words, 'synthesizes the others in a polymorphous identity based on the very principle of gender equivalence which keeps all these possibilities in play' (1991: 63).

What becomes clear, then, is that commercial exploitation of men's bodies in

contemporary ads is analogous, by and large, to the way women's bodies have routinely been represented. As has been the case for women throughout history, the male body has become an important promotional object - a commodity for consumption and entertainment, only in this case the terms have been reversed. Traditionally it is Man who gazes at Woman, now the male body is just as frequently the object of female voyeurism, not just in adland but in the media at large. As a direct result of this role reversal, Man himself, as the one being admired, has become redefined as the being whose natural condition it is to be in love with his own image (Wernick, 1991:62). Hence, by playing to men's anxieties about their looks, advertisers have not only actively encouraged male narcissism; they have also deliberately tried to construct a new image of masculinity which runs altogether counter to the traditional code of heterosexual voyeurism which defines women as the object of the look.

This development is not nearly as liberating as it at first glance appears to be. For it means that the more the media becomes obsessed with images of narcissistic, young men, and the more men in turn become obsessed with their own looks and appearance, the more intensively, on the interpersonal front, men enter into competitive circulation, at the risk of becoming reduced, like women before, to consumer goods themselves. Hence, the commodification of men and women in advertising has a dual character. As any fashion-oriented consumer knows, the consumption of fashion products and 'lifestyle accessories' involves more than just attending to different products and brands. It also involves attending to your own image, your construction as a salable package. This in turn increases the pressure on men and women to sell themselves as best they can, converting them, in effect, into self-promoting signs. In this context, the body on to which the fashion products are draped is simply the vehicle for the meaning that the self-promoting subject seeks to convey, making the subject himself a promotional construct attuned to the ever-changing requirements and trends of the fashion and vanity market (ibid:65).

Seen from this angle, the revision of advertising's gender codings - its traditional way of depicting men and women in ads - may be said to be 'a devil in disguise'. Thus, for producers of consumer goods, the shift towards a code of equivalence in the promotional imaging of men has meant a huge enlargement of the market for, especially, fashion and vanity goods, while for male consumers it has

meant an extension of promotional practices from their occupational lives to their private lives (cf. Wernick, 1991:62-63).

### *Toward a Redefinition of Gender Codes?*

Although the softening of the image of masculinity that we have witnessed in ads over the past 10 years might at first glance be read as a signifier of a more egalitarian, emancipated deployment of old gender codes - an attempt by advertisers to redress one of the imbalances in the way men and women have traditionally been portrayed - a closer reading suggests that the emancipatory content of this recoding is less far-reaching than it might seem. Despite the vision of male-female equality that advertisers have begun to project, the 'equivalence code' in contemporary ads reflects little more than men are being targeted for economic development and are undergoing a process of intensive consumerisation some 70 years after women went through a similar process.

Even from an extreme feminist point of view, it is difficult to see how the increasing prevalence of the male body beautiful in advertising has anything to do with gender equality. For while, at a superficial level, these images may be said to reflect women's increasing social, economic, and sexual power, the re-emergence of the traditional muscular image of men is, at the same time, part of the anti-feminist backlash. It is only a few years ago that men were being asked to reject the traditional, macho image and strive instead to become cuddly and sensitive, caring and sharing. But if any 'New Man' does still exist, he must be feeling a bit like a turkey on New Year's Day - well past his sell-by date.

The essential Nineties Man is no longer supposed to dedicate his life to supporting women and nurturing babies; that's now thought to be way too wimpy. His new role model is the so-called 'New Lad' - gentle with his girlfriend and kids, but also definitely macho with his mates - or even the Wild Man, the creation of Robert Bly, the author of *Iron John - A Book about Men* (Bly, 1992). Bly is trying to build a men's movement around the idea that men have gone soft in the face of feminism, and need to recover their inner vigour, wildness and strength. Yet even the Iron Johns of this world must be feeling pretty uncertain about what role to adopt if the images of contemporary ads are to be taken at face value. On the one hand, the pictures of handsome, muscular, young men help to construct an image of masculinity which



draws its references from the 'meaning pool' traditionally associated with the male (physique, power and control); on the other hand, the poses and facial expressions of the men depicted in ads often suggest the opposite: that men are in fact victims - helpless, confused and uncertain about their role in a society characterized by rapid technological change, mass unemployment, increasing female independence, and a life-threatening sexually transmitted disease. The inherent message seems to be that, if nothing else, men can at least exercise power and control over their own bodies. They may be surrounded by chaos and feeling like victims, but creating a kind of armour from taut flesh and solid muscle offers at least an illusion of protection. Needless to say, the products draped, splashed or poured on to the perfect bodies help them achieve this aim.

It is from this angle that 'the undressing of the male' that has taken place in advertising over the past two decades is so revealing. For while advertisers, like men themselves, may in part be responding to the inconsistencies of the post-1960s gender debate with confusion about what position to adopt, it is also clear that in the process they have redefined for their own purposes the concept of masculinity itself. The male body as a sex object has become an important part of advertising's appeal, not because the basic sex roles in society have changed, but because of its commercial value to producers of consumer goods. The male body, as depicted in ads over the last decade, is now at best just another commodity for consumption and pleasure, at worst an elaborate joke.

But before we can begin to elucidate the effects of these changed male representations, it may be useful first to examine the developments that have taken place over the past 30 years in the visual representation of men's bodies in ads.

## **Advertising's Three Decades of Male Iconography**

### *Methodology*

One of the most widely cited studies of the portrayal of gender roles in advertising is Erwin Goffman's *Gender advertisements* (Goffman, 1976). In it, Goffman analyses approximately 500 ads, using frame analysis to study male-female images in advertising. Briefly explained, frame analysis is a study of the *images* of pictured



women and men reflected in the poses contrived by the photographer. Elements of the pose (such as the relative positioning of the actors in relation to each other, postures or facial expressions) form the 'display' which, according to Goffman, informs the viewer about the social identity, mood, and intent of those portrayed, and simultaneously educates the viewer regarding acceptable behaviours and relationships for her or himself. As opposed to past content analyses which investigated 'sexist portrayals' of women and men by counting the number of women (or men) shown in ads and the quality of those images, Goffman's approach allows the exploration of the less obvious elements (or what Goffman calls 'the opaque goings-on') of an advertisement, thus offering insight into some of the subtler messages that are often conveyed in ads.

Since the aim of this study was to analyse the visual images of men presented in ads aimed at men, Goffman's analysis of gender display in print ads was used as a framework for the analysis. Although the presentation of the findings does not follow Goffman's classification system as such,<sup>2</sup> it does focus explicitly on the visual cues of the adverts examined and, specifically, on the expected roles and meanings associated with these images.

The ads were selected from a random sample of media, including both print adverts and television commercials. They cover the period from approximately 1965 to 1995. Most of them are of British origin, but many of them will also be familiar to an international audience, since quite a few of them, particularly the more recent ones, fall within the category of international, 'standardized' ads. Ads which have been found to be similar as regards the postures, roles and meanings reflected in the images of the male actors portrayed are presented as archetypes, each representing a different period of time in post-1960s British advertising.

### *Bond Man*

In the late 1960s there was little evidence of male vanity in any recognisable form. Men in this scenario were only allowed bodies when it was necessary to signal strength. The most common archetype of the desirable male was Bond Man as portrayed by William Franklyn in UK commercials for Schweppes soft drinks. Bond Man epitomised the urbane older man, regarded then as the sexual ideal. He was

masterful, fearless, active and always over-dressed - his polo-neck was never off. The only hint of insecurity was provided by his rather suspicious interest in phallic accessories which, even in the relatively chaste world of 1960s advertising, were frequently lurking behind the most apparently innocent of objects. But the phallus was almost never 'the real thing' - it was something (cars, cigars, women) that men were encouraged to possess on the basis that it would make (bigger) men out of them. This is why Walls sausages could be unblushingly sold in 1965 on the basis that they were 'real man-sized meat'. Strength, not beauty, was the masculine ideal (*Campaign*, 1994, p. 31).

A more modern example of Bond Man can be found in adverts for Boss clothing and accessories which, until recently, have featured Michael Flinn in the role of the successful, focused and career-oriented businessman of the 1980s. Like Bond Man, he signalled power and strength, to the point of being almost inhuman. He has now been replaced by a younger representative of The New (Boss) Generation who, whilst still representing the dynamic businessman, displays a more multifaceted and less controlled image of masculinity.

### *Old Spice Man*

The big leap toward male vanity came in the beginning of the 1970s with the introduction of after-shave products. This brought the male body into direct focus - if scent in general conjures up associations of the body, male scent must be connotative of the male body. This was the cue for the introduction of Old Spice Man, who came in two 'waves'. The first commercial was 'swimmer', which featured a young man in trunks enjoying an early-morning swim (1971), and the second was 'surfer' five years later (Ibid). Although the advertisers were careful to disguise male vanity through appeals to practicality and outdoor ruggedness ('that masculine freshness'), the ads did feature men wearing very little clothes.

The perceived danger of using an attractive and nearly naked young man to sell personal products to men was evident in the way the advertisers tried to convince the audience that using after-shave was in no way to be interpreted as a sign of 'unmanliness'. Hence the Old Spice Surfer was actively 'mastering' nature, a woman's face was superimposed, her hair rolling like the waves, to ram home the point that nature equals woman. In case the audience harboured any doubts, they were reassured

by the voice-over that Old Spice was 'the mark of a man'.

Old Spice Man may have been allowed a body and some of the pleasures that go with it, but he still had to prove he was a man, and that there was nothing effeminate about him. Advertisers were playing an understandably dishonest game that was to become increasingly common throughout the 1970s: appealing more and more directly to male vanity and passing off that appeal as something 'naturally' masculine.

### *Brut Man*

After Old Spice Man came Brut Man. The two types shared many similar characteristics, but there was one important difference: Brut Man was sold as an after-shave on the basis that it made men smell nice ('the great smell of Brut'). With that admission came another: after-shave was in fact about having a desirable body. Nevertheless, the male body still had to be presented in a very manly situation that even today is often the 'natural' setting for the promotion of male vanity products: the work-out. Hence, in one of the Brut commercials shown on British TV in 1980, the football player Kevin Keegan, dressed only in a pair of shorts, did press-ups and sit-ups - allowing the audience to enjoy his body at the same time as the football player repudiated any passivity by his energetic activity.

For all his careful disavowals, with Brut Man the male body as an object of desire had finally become a legitimate advertising appeal : 'Brut 33. Splash it on. For the body beautiful'. Keegan delivered this revolutionary slogan flexing a bicep for the camera - deliberately combining the appeal to beauty (an 'unmanly' aspiration) with an appeal to strength (a 'manly' aspiration).

### *Active Passive Man*

Outright narcissism had previously been regarded as a feminine and, by definition, passive, quality. In the 1970s men did not yet have the courage to come out of the bathroom closet about their vanity. This led to the phenomenon of Active Passive Man (named after the products sold under this heading - see below). Active Passive Man was irresistible to women - in fact he drove them wild. He was a sex object, but he tried to disguise his passivity as a result of active female desire, his impassivity hence translating into something masculine and attractive. He featured in ads for Denim and Tabac 'Active Man', usually on the receiving end of uncontrollable female

lust. Unlike Brut Man, he was not restricted to aftershave work. Thus tobacco commercials for Benson and Hedge's 'Havana Leaf' presented an immobile man smoking a cigar with a quivering woman unable to leave him alone. Active Passive Man became a common sight in all kinds of advertisements aimed at men throughout the 1970s (*Campaign*, 1994, p. 31).

### *Tetley Bitterman*

A close cousin of Active Passive Man was Tetley Bitterman, who was introduced in the late 1970s. Tetley Bitterman was unmoved and inexpressive to the point of being moronic. He offered the male viewer a vision of male strength and authenticity untouched by the upheavals of the gender debate and the emergence of male narcissism. His virility did not come out of a bottle but out of a pump - beer was represented as a commodity as naturally and essentially masculine as testosterone. He was plain-looking and had large hands. Being working class and Northern, his body was his trade, not his vanity. Unlike Active Passive Man, his heterosexuality was signalled by being surrounded by other Bittermen, rather than by women. He died a quick death, but was reincarnated in the late 1980s in the Australian outback promoting Castlemaine XXXX (*Ibid*).

Common to the Active Passive Men of the 1970s was that their body was the visual focus of attention, depicting them as sex objects in much the same way as women had earlier been portrayed. Their faces were hardly ever shown, just their bodies being caressed by female hands. One example is a 1978 commercial for Denim after-shave where the only facial part that is visible is a large square chin, belonging to a man with a pair of equally large square hands which attempt to stop a woman's hand from unbuttoning his shirt. The male voice-over points out that Denim is for the man who 'doesn't have to try too hard' ... to be a man, the voice-over might have added, for that is clearly the meaning of the message. What the ad portrays is a state of masculine ease that must have been very appealing, and unattainable, for many men at this point in time.

### *Levi's Man*

Very soon, Active Passive Man stopped bothering to prevent himself being undressed. The 1980s drive for individualism and cultivation of the self gave male narcissism the

excuse it needed to finally manifest itself, by freeing men of the fear of what their mates would say. In the decade of ambition and aspiration, commercials told men that they were the centre of their own world. Thus Halifax Cardcash portrayed a single man living happily with his cat in an American-style warehouse flat, waking up to the tunes of 'Easy (like Sunday morning)' (1987). And commercials for Miller Lite - 'He aint heavy, he's my brother' - negotiated the idea of a beer drinker who was one of the crowd yet apart from it at the same time (1991).

All this was preceded by the emergence of Levi's Man - wearing only his white boxer shorts in Bartle Bogle and Hegarty's famous 'laundrette' commercial from 1985. The film portrayed a young man who was clearly not shy and who was also, crucially, doing his own washing (and this was supposed to be in the 1950s!). Where was the 'little woman' in his life who, in adland, is supposed to take care of such trivial chores? Nowhere apparently, since Nick Kamen was obviously living alone. Levi's Man was a rebel, an outsider, at ease in his own, somewhat strange and defiantly narcissistic world.

### *Yuppie Man*

Commercials for shaving products were quick to follow this trend. Gillette Contour Plus 'exercise' blended it with the 1980s drive toward competitiveness and success, featuring a muscular young man in shorts working out in his own gym. This was 'Yuppie Man Plus' who was ready for anything and liked to think he was in control of everything, especially his most treasured private property: his body. Yuppie Man was a close relative of the 1970s Active Passive Man and, despite being more open about his narcissism, still had a problem with passivity - hence the exercise theme which was reminiscent of the Brut Man workout a decade earlier.

### *New Man*

As the 1980s drew to a close and its excesses had given its individualistic credo a bad name, Gillette launched a new campaign, 'the best a man can get', which attempted to marry the personal aspirations and ambitions of the Yuppie Man with the social obligations of marriage and kids. Images of pumped-up bodies in gyms and sports arenas were intercut with joyful scenes of white weddings and father/son 'quality time' moments, such as the handing over of the keys to junior's first car. The male body was



still on display but it was no longer self-sufficient. At the same time, Levi's modified their message in the 'swimmer' commercial, where the male swimmer initially swims alone but is magically joined by a female diver in the final scenes (1992).

In effect, this was the time of New Man. The earlier manifestation of male narcissism, while being welcomed by women because it gave them permission to gaze on the male body, left men too independent. The New Man was an attempt to preserve the pleasure of female voyeurism at the same time as assuring women that these men might be vain but they weren't selfish and they still needed women. This need was symbolised in many ads by muscular young men holding babies or playing with their children with their lovely, young wife smiling blissfully in the background.

### *Ironic Man*

But of course New Man was selfish after all. He might hold babies for the camera (the hero of Gillette's commercial even drove the baby to sleep in his car), but he was not about to start changing nappies or giving up his career to look after children full-time - that remained work for women. The only thing that was new about New Man was his openness about his vanity. Like Tetly Bitterman, New Man died a quick death, only to be resurrected as Ironic Man, for example in commercials such as Wall's 'Too Good To Be True' (promoting frozen meals), where a Chippendale type in briefs tells his female partner that 'dinner's nearly ready', and the shopping is 'on its way'.

### *Torso Man*

With the New Man revealed to be a dead-end street, the only way forward was to step up the objectification of men even more. This could only be achieved by taking even more of their clothes off. A cloud of ads in the 1990s have done just that, promoting a wide range of products (clothes, cars, alcohol, beer, foodstuffs, etc.,) to men. Even a traditionally conservative firm like Marks & Spencer has used a nearly-naked young man to sell socks to men, employing the slogan 'Socks appeal from Marks & Spencer' (M&S, 1995). Not surprisingly, the visual exploitation of the male body has been particularly evident in advertisements for personal-care products aimed at men. Muscular male torsos have promoted almost every brand of after-shave - Boss, Insensé, Minotaure, Kouros, Obsession - but the image has usually been cropped just enough below the waist to reveal to the audience that these men are not wearing much



underneath. In many cases, the cropping also cuts off the model's head, the final image remaining that of an anonymous, idealised, phallicised piece of meat. The emergence of Torso Man provides incontrovertible evidence that the male body has now become just another commodity dangling on the advertising hook.

Curiously, the passivity and helplessness of Torso Man is often part of his appeal. Thus an advert for Davidoff's Cool Water, currently running in British and international magazines, is a regular flesh-fest in which the camera literally *drools* over the over-developed pectorals of a bronzed model who seems to be begging wordlessly (the verbal text speaks for him - torsos do not speak!) - 'Soothe me! Cool me!'. As if to underline the vulnerability of Torso Man, the film version of the ad features a shot of bare male buttocks in what may be the first shot of this kind, at least in British TV advertising history.

### *Chippendale Man*

The most recent Levi's ad - 'Creek' - marks a return to Levi's Man values. Just like Nick Kamen in 1985, the male hero of 'creek' is independent and alone (he is a cowboy). To maintain the illicit thrill, the female voyeurs are innocent Amish girls and the ad is set in the 19th century. The objectification owes something to Torso Man (his face is largely obscured), and with his long hair and sculpted body, he is reminiscent of a member of the Chippendales.

'Creek' is far more 'knowing' than any previous Levi's ad. For a start, women are offered voyeurism at its limit, although that in itself is nothing new. What is new is the way the male body has been filmed - it is pure strip-tease, with the camera tracking down the bather's torso in a manner that can only be described as pornographic - hence the tasteful grainy black-and-white style of the scene. As the nude comboy gets out of the water, music is crescendoing, to reveal....not what thousands of women have undoubtedly hoped for but.... the product. After all these years of undressing the male, nothing is apparently sacred any more.

## The Male Body as Sexual Display

From looking back at advertising's three decades of male iconography it is hard not to notice the more and more explicit use of phallic imagery and references. Clearly, the penis itself - the ultimate symbol of masculinity - has come further and further into the frame, producing some startling images that would have been unthinkable only a decade ago. One example is a recent advert for Calvin Klein underwear, in which Marky Mark, one of the emerging male supermodels, draws attention to the product by grapping his credentials through the white cotton. This provoked the American talk-show host, David Letterman, on seeing a Calvin Klein poster on the side of a bus, to comment: 'When did this become OK? I mean, when I was a kid you could get arrested for doing that anywhere near a bus!' (cited in: *Campaign*, 1994, p. 32).

Of course, humour and irony always work well with these kinds of images. In fact, with the audience's level of symbolic literacy rising all the time, humour often has to be employed to flatter the audience's knowingness of phallic imagery. This is exemplified by the well-known ad for Perrier in which the bottle is stroked by a female hand until the top unscrews and the contents shoot out. Paco Rabanne took things further in 1993 with the appropriately named XS scent. A topless man gripped a bottle of after-shave over his belt buckle while sitting back watching images of sexy women on TV until he finally squirted the liquid on to his stomach.

However much social norms change, it seems unlikely, though, that the phallus will ever actually be shown. After all, the main aim of many contemporary ads is to challenge the audience in an intellectual way, making them an active part of the meaning-production process. Like the Chippendales, advertisers know that their business is to tease and 'keep them guessing' - when the briefs come off, the curtain comes down.

## *Gender Roles as Display*

Goffman believed that advertisements picturing women and men in interaction offered 'gender displays' that educated the viewer about conventional (i.e. appropriate) modes of gender interaction and sex roles. As such, he believed, that 'gender advertisements' often serve to reinforce the roles women and men perform and are expected to play.

According to this view advertising simply mirrors the role displays already in force in everyday interaction between members of the two sexes.

However, advertising has a way of redefining cultural constructs and behavioural patterns to suit its own purposes. As Ewen & Ewen (1982) contend, 'the image, the commercial, reaches out to sell more than a service or product; it sells a way of understanding the world'. Hence the way advertising portrays men and women is likely to have a significant impact on the way we perceive and interpret our roles as men and women, and consequently on the way we behave in relation to each other. As observed by Vivian Gornick in the introduction to *Gender Advertisements* (Goffman, 1979:12):

Advertisements depict for us not necessarily how we actually behave as men and women but how we *think* men and women behave. This depiction serves the social purpose of convincing us that this is how men and women are, or want to be, or should be, not only in relation to themselves but in relation to each other.

Although the emphasis here is on how women and men are portrayed together, the same thesis would seem to apply to the portrayal of men alone: the excessive promotion of the male body beautiful that we are currently witnessing in advertising and the media at large is likely to influence not only men's body-image and self-image, but also cultural and social norms regarding the roles men are expected to play in relation to women, and vice versa.

## **Conclusion and Directions for Future Research**

The role of psychological meaning in the interpretation of consumer advertisements and its influence on the shaping of cultural values is well documented in advertising research (Belk & Pollay, 1985; Lysonski, 1985; Pollay, 1986). Suffice it here to say that the subtle and sometimes blatant messages communicated by advertisers contribute to the definition of what is considered socially acceptable behaviour by men and women (Klassen et al, 1993). Having redefined for its own purposes the construct of masculinity, advertisers have not only made it legitimate for men to care about their

body and how they look in women's (and other men's) eyes. They have also, and crucially, linked up male vanity and narcissism with the act of consumption itself, hence furthering a development toward increasing self-promotion and 'personal selling' at all levels of social interaction.

The more the media becomes obsessed with images of narcissistic, exhibitionist young men, the more men are at risk of following women down the destructive path to an obsession with appearance which, in a cultural and sociological perspective, could lead to an ever more self-promoting culture in which both men and women become increasingly focused, 'not on realizing themselves as self-activating subjects, but on maximizing their value as circulating tokens of exchange' (Wernick, 1991, p. 66).

While it is hard to imagine that promotional practices in the way men and women are portrayed in advertising will be revised drastically in the years to come, the possibility still remains that the excessive promotion of men as sexual icons will eventually create a backlash among men which will lead them to question how women's bodies are routinely represented. Academic research could help further this development. Until now, the vast majority of research in this area has been concerned with the representation of women in the media. However, focussing solely on the depiction of femininity, while seemingly exempting the masculine from visual representation, helps to preserve a cultural fiction that masculinity is not socially constructed. To understand the impact that advertising has on our perception of self and otherness in relation to gender, it is imperative that we focus not only on the ways in which advertising constructs femininity as a cultural category, but also on its construction of masculinity, in order to establish the ways in which 'masculinity is an effect of culture, a construction, a performance, a masquerade, rather than a universal and unchanging essence' (Cohan & Hark, 1993:7). It would also be useful to examine how the images of the masculine propagated by advertising compare with other cultural representations of masculinity, and to examine how these meanings feed back into dominant discourses surrounding gender. The cultural myths of what constitutes masculinity, and any changes in the social perceptions of masculinity post-feminism, might be illuminated by a comparative analysis of, for example, cinematic masculinity vs promotional masculinity, or by comparison with other male oriented genres within popular fiction.

## Notes

1. Cited in an article published in *The Sunday Times*, 22 January 1995, on the subject of selling health and fitness to men (Goodwin, 1995).

2. Goffman's operates with two basic advertising formats identified as 'traditional pose' and 'reverse-sex pose' which are identified on the basis of a classification system consisting of five types of subtle messages : 1) relative size, 2) the feminine touch, 3) licensed withdrawal, 4) function ranking, and 5) the ritualization of subordination. The 'traditional pose' describes ads that depict men and women in roles and identities stereotypically associated with members of each sex, while the 'reverse-sex pose' describes ads where the actors are portrayed in ways that are precisely the opposite of those stereotypically associated with the sexes, and thus undermine the social expectation of the roles and positions men and women are supposed to play. Goffman's classification system is described in more detail in Klassen, Jasper & Schwartz (1993), and Goffman ( 1979).

## References

- Belk, R. & Pollay, R.W. (1985) "Images of ourselves: The good life in twentieth century advertising", *Journal of Consumer Research*, vol. 11 (March).
- Bly, R. (1993) *Iron John. A book about men*, London: Element Books.
- Campaign, (1994) "Advertising and the Male Sex", 29 July, 30-32.
- Cohan, S. & Hark, IR. (eds) (1993) *Screening the male: exploring masculinities in Hollywood cinema*, London: Routledge.
- Ewen, S., & Ewen, E. (1982) *Channels of Desire: Mass images and the shaping of American consciousness*, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Fejes, F. (1992) "Images of men in media research", *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, no. 6, 215-221.
- Ferguson, J.H., Kreshel, P.J., & Tinkham S.F. (1990) "In the pages of Ms: sex role portrayals of women in advertising", *Journal of Advertising*, 19, 40-51.
- Foucault, M. (1981) *The History of Sexuality, volume one, an introduction*, Hammondsworth: Pelican.
- Goffman, E. (1979) *Gender Advertisements*, London: Macmillan.
- Goodwin, C. (1995) "Commando Tactics", *The Sunday Times*, 22 January.
- Gornik, V. (1979) "Introduction", in *Gender Advertisements*, (ed.) E. Goffman, New York: Harper Colophon Books.
- Greer, G. (1979) *The Female Eunuch*, London: Granada.
- Holmlund, (1993) "Masculinity as multiple masquerade: the 'mature' Stallone and the Stallone clone", in *Screening the male: exploring masculinities in Hollywood cinema*, (eds) S Choan & IR Hark, 213-229.
- Klassen, M.L., Jasper, C.R., & Schwartz, A.M. (1993) "Men and Women: Images of their relationships in magazine advertisements", *Journal of Advertising Research*, March-April, 30-39.
- Kuhn, A. & Keegan, P. (1985) *The power of the image: essays on representation and sexuality*, London: Routledge.
- Lyonski, S. (1985), "Role Portrayals in British Magazine Advertisements", *European Journal of Marketing* 19, 7, 37-55.
- Pollay, R. W. (1986) "The Distorted Mirror: Reflections on the Unintended Consequences of Advertising", *Journal of Marketing*, 50, 2, 18-36.



- Strate, L. (1992) "Beer commercials: a manual on masculinity", in *Men, masculinity and the media* (ed) Craig, S., 78-92, Newbury Park: Sage.
- Wernick, A. (1991) "(Re-)imaging Gender: The Case of Men", in *Promotional Culture. Advertising, Ideology, and Symbolic Expression*, London: Sage Publications, 48-66.

## European Studies

European Research Unit, Aalborg University

1. Ulf Hedetoft: *Euronationalism - or how the EC affects the nation-state as a repository of identity*, 1990 (30 p.).
2. *European Research Programme - Annual Report 1989/90*, 1991 (34 p.).
3. Ernst-Ullrich Pinkert: *Die 'Jungfer Europa' und der 'Genius der Freiheit' in Skandinavien*, 1991 (13 p.).
4. Carola Opitz-Wiemers: *Das kontrollierete Bewußtsein. Zu Ingeborg Bachmanns Romanzyklus "Todesarten"*, 1991 (15 p.).
5. Ernst-Ullrich Pinkert (red.): *Politisk tegnsætning. Nationale symboler og national identitet i Europa og i Den tredje Verden*, Aalborg Universitetsforlag, 1991 (165 p.).
6. Ernst-Ullrich Pinkert (red.): *Drømmen om Amerika i Europa*, Aalborg Universitetsforlag, 1993 (144 p.).
7. Ulf Hedetoft (red.): *Nation or Integration? Perspectives on Europe in the 90s*, Aalborg Universitetsforlag, 1993 (143 p.).
8. Occasional Paper: Otto Preu: *Difficulties and possibilities of Christian-inspired politics in the Eastern part of Germany before and after 1989. A personal summary*, 1994 (11 p.).
9. Occasional Paper: Werner Biechele: *Stepchildren of German Literature? Political causes and cultural consequences of the way to handle German-language Literatures of South-East Europe in Germany*, 1994 (13 p.).
10. Occasional Paper: Wolfgang Zank: *Nation, Customs Union, Political Union - Collective Identity, Economy, and Politics in Germany 1771-1871 in a non-Structuralist Perspective*, 1994 (27 p.).
11. Occasional Paper: Staffan Zetterholm: *Politics and Cultural Discrimination. The dynamics of culture-based politics*, 1994 (15 p.).
12. Occasional Paper: Lissi Daber: *Ireland's Fifth Province: The Field Day Project and Cultural Identity in Northern Ireland*, 1994 (11 p.).
13. Occasional Paper: Ulf Hedetoft: *The Cultural Semiotics of 'European Identity': Between National Sentiment and Transnational Imperative*, 1995 (43 p.).
14. Occasional Paper: Ulf Hedetoft: *Nationers tegn. Resumé af og et appendix til en doktorafhandling*, 1995 (115 p.).

15. Occasional Paper: Henrik Halkier and Mike Danson: *Regional Development Agencies in Western Europe. A Survey of Key Characteristics and Trends*, 1996 (30 p.).
16. Occasional Paper: Henrik Halkier: *Institutions, Power and Regional Policy*, 1996 (71 p.).
17. Occasional Paper: Ulf Hedetoft and Antje Herrberg: *Russia and the European Other: Searching for a Post-Soviet Identity*, 1996 (28 p.).
18. Occasional Paper: Charlotte Damborg and Henrik Halkier: *Regional Development Agencies in Denmark. Towards a New Type of Bottom-up Regional Policy?*, 1996 (33 p.).
19. Occasional Paper: Staffan Zetterholm: *The Concept of Integration*, 1997 (27 p.).
20. Occasional Paper: Søren von Dönners: *Networks in Danish EU-policy Making*, 1997 (29 p.).
21. Occasional Paper: Antje Herrberg: *The European Union and Russia: Towards a new ostpolitik?*, 1997 (36 p.).
22. Occasional Paper: Henrik Halkier & Charlotte Damborg: *Networks, Development Agencies and Intelligent Regions - towards a framework for empirical analysis*, 1997 (25 p.).
23. Occasional Paper: Poul Thøis Madsen: *Public Procurement and the Single Market. Consequences of EC tenders in Denmark with special respect to the of innovation and integration*, 1997 (14 p.).
24. Occasional Paper: Hanne Niss: *MADE IN DENMARK. Summary of a PhD dissertation on the role and function of national images in Danish export promotion*, completed June 1993, 1997 (23 p.).